

## Child-Parent Relationship

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

*"Honor your father and mother" - which is the first commandment with a promise - "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth"*

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children;*

*instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21

Filial respect is a natural as well as a universal law. Ephesians 6:1 is therefore well known and probably well-taught. Paul commands children to obey their parents. It is imperative, an obligation not an option on the part of the children. But not as well known is Paul's command to parents in verse 4 "not to exasperate" their children. Though not as well taught, it is equally a command, not just to fathers (although the address it to them), but to both father and mother. The word itself could mean parents in general (Colossians 3:21). The context demands that the mother be included for verses 1-3 certainly talks about both parents.

### A. Restraint of Parental Authority - A Revolutionary Concept

Not only is Paul's injunction (not suggestion) uncommon, it was revolutionary when we consider that it was given to Christians living in a society in which a father's authority was absolute.

Writes one authority:

"A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child."

Only in Christ do we find a beautiful balance in the instruction concerning human relationships not found anywhere else. A child's personality is delicate; therefore it must be handled with care.

### B. How May Parents Exasperate Their Children

To exasperate means "to make more grievous or painful; to make very angry; to irritate to a high degree" (Chamber's Dictionary).

Adults (Parents) exasperate their children ...

1. **By using reproachful, insulting, abusive terms on them**

A classic example is King Saul calling Jonathan: "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman" (1 Samuel 20:30). Some parents use imprecations and curses on their children (or others) which certainly exasperate them. How can we have God bless them if we curse them? Watch our language on children!

2. **By punishing them without a cause, or when the correction exceeds the fault** (i.e., punishment is too excessive for the crime)

A tyrant does this, not a father. "Saul hurled a spear at Jonathan to kill him, as Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger ... he did not eat" (1 Samuel 20:33-34). "A father exercises a kingly power over his son, not that of a tyrant" (Davenant).

3. **By acting partially toward their children**

Some parents show more kindness to one child than to another. It is possible for a parent to love one child more than another, but discretion should lead him/her to be impartial. Jacob showed more love to Joseph than all his other children which naturally exasperated his brothers.

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, ... when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak kind word to him."

Genesis 37:3-4

4. **By laying commands upon their children which they cannot perform without wronging their conscience**

King Saul ordered Jonathan, his son to bring David to him: "Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!" (1 Samuel 20:31b). Jonathan could not obey the command with a clear conscience; but was clearly exasperated (1 Samuel 20:34)!

C. **How shall parents bring up their children**

Negatively, parents are commanded not to exasperate their children. Positively, parents are to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord".

1. **Upbringing; training and instruction in the Lord**

The words Paul uses are instructive. "Bring them up" literally means to "nourish" or "feed" when applied to our bodies. Here it refers to the upbringing of children. John Calvin translates: "Let them be fondly cherished ... deal gently with them. Children are fragile personalities; handle with care!" It implies that time and trouble are needed in the upbringing of our children. A commentator writes: "If parents but gave as much thought to the rearing of their children as they do to the rearing of animals and flowers,

the situation would be very different".

While the word "training" (*paideia*) means training by discipline, including punishment; the word "instruction" refers to the training by word - by word of encouragement, when this is sufficient; but also that of remonstrance, of reproof, of blame, where these may be required (Trench, *Synonyms*, p.112) God's word is clear: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Proverbs 13:24; 22:15). Thus parents must be firm as well as gentle, for love and discipline go together. He must be firm enough to discipline and punish when necessary; gentle in reaffirming his love for him both before and after the discipline action has been meted out.

## 2. **Three more practical steps**

### a. Pray much for them

It was said that Monica prayed so much for her son Augustine that it was impossible that a son of so many prayers and tears should perish. Pray that as your children bear your images in their faces, they may bear God's image in their hearts.

### b. Encourage and command everything good and commendable

"Goodness increased when praised." Commending that which is good in your children makes them more in love with virtuous actions; and is like watering the plants, which makes them grow more. Some parents are indifferent or worse still discourage the good they see in their children, and so nip virtue in the land, and help damn their children's souls.

### c. Set them a good example

Children despise parents when the parents live in contradiction to their own precepts. For example, parents do you send your children to Sunday School and are not part of the Sunday School yourselves? "An ounce of example is worth a pound of advice!" Someone wrote:

"A father is a looking-glass which the child often dresses himself by: let the glass be clear and unspotted."

Parents should observe great decorum in their whole conduct, lest they give occasion to their children to say to them: "If I have done evil, I have learned it from you".

CHILDREN SEE, CHILDREN DO!

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Jul/Aug 1986 issue of CEF News, Singapore